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CORE UNIT 1: YOUR KEY RESPONSIBILITIES AS A SCHOOL BUS DRIVER

Unit 1 Topics

- 1.1 Your Responsibility for Safety
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Introduction

Unit 1 of the *Pre-Service Course* will introduce you to the most important responsibilities of a school bus driver. Driving a school bus is a job like no other. Because you are responsible for children's safety, your community expects the highest standards of conduct and professionalism in everything you do. Because New York's school bus drivers take this responsibility so seriously, our state's school bus safety record is the best in the nation. By becoming a New York State school bus driver, you are joining a demanding but proud profession.

1.1 Your Responsibility for Safety

1.1.1 Student safety is the priority at all times. Safety is important in many jobs, but for a school bus driver, student safety is always the priority. No matter what happens, your main responsibility is protecting the students on your bus, or in the process of getting on or off your bus.

Your main responsibility is protecting the students on your bus.

1.1.2 Safety judgment. "Safety first" is not just a slogan for a school bus driver. Once you have begun driving school bus with students on board, you *will* be confronted with situations that require quick and decisive action on your part. Sometimes you will be faced with a clear choice between student safety and other priorities. For instance, one day soon you may be substituting for another driver who is sick, and find yourself running late on the run for reasons beyond your control. There are many reasons school buses sometimes run late; it is a common occurrence in any school district. When running late, a school bus driver faces a clear choice: drive faster to try to get back on schedule, or inform base by radio that you will arrive at school a little late that morning. Getting students to school on time is important, but "safety first, schedule second" is always the right decision if you're running late for any reason.

Occasionally you will encounter a student who, in spite of your requests, simply refuses to follow a key safety rule, such as waiting for your signal before crossing the road at the bus

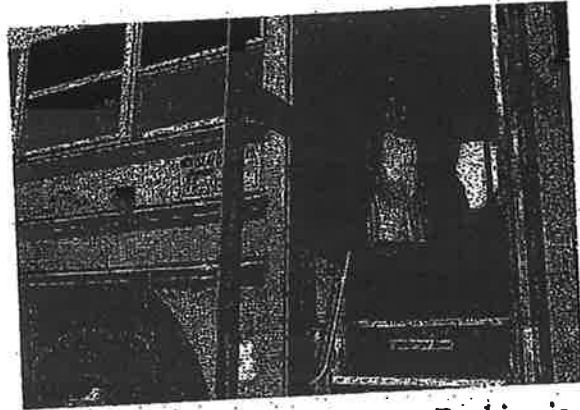
stop. Convincing students to be safe is not always easy. Again, the bus driver is faced with a clear choice in such a situation: "keep the peace" with students by allowing them to ignore safety rules, or report the students to a supervisor or principal so the problem can be corrected, even if it takes a suspension from school to do it. It is good to be friendly with students, but safety must come first. Students who refuse to follow safety rules must be reported.

This course cannot cover every scenario you may face as a school bus driver. When transporting dozens of children in a large vehicle over a wide variety of roadway and weather conditions, unexpected events will occur. As a professional school bus driver, one of your most important responsibilities is to exercise good "safety judgment" when confronted with an unusual situation. Placing student safety first is always the right course.

It is your responsibility to drive defensively at all times.

1.1.3 Defensive driving. It is your responsibility to drive defensively at all times. This means doing everything you can to avoid accidents and crashes in spite of the unsafe actions of other motorists. Traffic congestion and the hectic pace of modern life combine to create a very challenging roadway environment in most areas of our state. While driving your bus you will encounter an astounding variety of risk-taking, distracted, and impaired motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The outstanding safety record of school bus drivers is only because they remain constantly alert for potentially dangerous motorists and hazardous traffic situations.

Defensive driving means adjusting your speed based on weather and road conditions. Severe winter weather is a fact of life in many parts of our state. Fog is common in many areas. When roads are slippery or visibility is



limited, you need to slow down. Rushing is always dangerous in a school bus, but in bad weather it's a recipe for disaster.

1.1.4 Distractions. School bus drivers must be able to stay focused on safe driving in spite of distractions. With children on board, school bus drivers face more distractions than other commercial drivers. You must learn to temporarily tune out onboard behavior problems during safety-critical driving tasks, such as approaching an intersection or while picking up or dropping off students.

1.1.5 Care and custody of children. As a school bus driver you are legally responsible for the safety of the students assigned to your bus. In some ways a school bus driver's responsibility is similar to a parent's towards his or her own child. This means you are expected to do what you can to protect a child just as a responsible parent would in similar circumstances.

Our society gives parents wide latitude in how they raise their own children, but draws the line at abuse. Knowingly allowing a child to be abused or hurt is unacceptable for bus

drivers as it is for parents. Ignoring a situation that clearly places a child at risk – a threat of violence against a child, for instance – is not only unethical but could expose a school bus driver to legal sanctions.

Rushing is always dangerous in a school bus.

Because school bus drivers are responsible for the “care and custody” of children, it is important that every child assigned to your bus can be accounted for. For instance, changing the location of a child’s bus stop without authorization, dropping off a child at a friend’s house without a school-approved note, or leaving a sleeping child on board your bus at the end of a route, are all violations of your “custodial responsibility” toward students. Each of these examples could result not only in a child being hurt, or worse, but potentially in personal liability for the bus driver.

1.2 Professional Conduct

1.2.1 Language and appearance. As a school bus driver, you are a representative of your school district. This is true whether you work directly for the school system, or for a private bus company contracting with it. You will be interacting regularly not only with children but with parents, teachers, school administrators, and the public. It is essential that you conduct yourself in a mature and professional manner at all times. This includes language. Cursing – even “mild” cursing such as “damn” or “hell” – and off-color jokes are unacceptable in any school setting.

Whether you work directly for the school system, or for a private bus company contracting with it, you are a representative of the school district.

As a school bus driver, your personal appearance matters. Clean, neat clothes and excellent hygiene are job requirements. Taking pride in how you dress for the job can have a positive impact on how children perceive you. To be treated as a professional, you must act like a professional.

“Sexy” apparel – revealing tops or “short-shorts,” for instance – are inappropriate around children. Clothing with potentially offensive, adult-oriented slogans or graphics must be avoided.

Keeping your bus clean is very important. School buses stand out. A dirty bus will be interpreted by the public as a lack of professionalism in general. An unswept floor, an overflowing trash container, or a cluttered driver area all tell students that you don’t really take pride in the job. A dirty bus is a shaky foundation for student management.

1.2.2 Reliability. As a school bus driver, showing up late for work creates serious safety problems.

- Rushing through a pre-trip inspection means you might miss a serious mechanical problem.

A dirty bus will be interpreted by the public as a lack of professionalism and tells students you don't take pride in your job.

- Inconsistent route times confuse children waiting at bus stops. They may go back home or try to walk to school if they think they've missed the bus. A child who finally spots your approaching bus might rush across the street without thinking and be struck by a car – it has happened.
- Trying to make up time on a route is always a bad idea. Safety at the bus stop, when children are most exposed to danger, requires a focused, unhurried alertness on the part of the bus driver. Being in a hurry when picking up or dropping off children is extremely dangerous.

A professional school bus driver always arrives for work early enough to go over any changes for the morning route. Arriving early gives you time to check out a spare if your regular bus needs to be repaired. In wintry conditions, professional drivers leave home earlier so they can make it to work on time over slippery roads and give themselves enough time to clear snow from the bus.

Excellent attendance is important for school bus drivers. If you are not there, someone who is less familiar with your route and your students will have to drive for you. Even the best substitute cannot provide the same level of safety as the regular driver.

If you are too ill to concentrate on driving, you should not work that day. If you are genuinely

sick, you need to stay home to avoid spreading your illness to co-workers and children. But abusing sick days by missing work for frivolous reasons, or by scheduling medical and dental appointments during driving hours when they could easily have been scheduled between runs, is not the way of a professional school bus driver.

1.2.3 Honesty. Sooner or later, even the most safety-conscious school bus driver is likely to make a mistake. For instance, you may hit a curb while making a tight turn. You might drive past a child's house on the morning route, or back into a sign at a turnaround.

As a school bus driver, it is your responsibility to do everything you can to prevent an accident. But transportation supervisors realize that no driver is perfect. As long as the incident was not caused by *deliberate and willful* indifference to a child's safety or adds to a pattern of unsafe incidents, most supervisors ask only that you learn from your mistake so that it doesn't happen again.

Failing to immediately report even a minor incident is a major mistake when transporting children. Understandably, parents expect complete honesty about any unusual situation involving their children.

Any incident in which there is even a slight possibility that a child might have been hurt must be reported at once – from where it happened, if possible. For instance, a child may have slid off the bus seat and bumped his head when your bus went over a pothole. The injury might be very minor – *just a bump* – but it might also turn out to be very serious. Remember, not all children can communicate and not all injuries are apparent. Report possible injuries immediately – don't wait until you've completed your run.

The same guideline applies if your bus makes contact with another vehicle or a fixed object such as a mailbox or a sign. No matter how minor the accident, and regardless of whether you were at fault, immediate reporting from the scene and complete honesty about what happened is always the best way to protect your students and yourself. And remember, thanks to cell phones parents will now be at any incident or accident scene in a few minutes anyway.

Failure to immediately report even a minor incident is a major mistake.

It is only human nature to feel upset if you've been involved in an accident, even a minor one. You may feel embarrassed to inform base over the radio. But trying to cover up even a minor incident usually backfires, sometimes with tragic results. For instance, if you mistakenly drive past a child's stop one morning, you may be reluctant to report it over the radio. Why not just back up your bus to the stop you missed?

But backing up to return to a stop is extremely dangerous. You could easily back into a car that's pulled up behind you. Or, far worse, you could back over a child chasing after your bus. It has happened.

The safest thing to do if you go past a stop is to call base immediately by radio. With a dispatcher's help, there are many ways to handle such a minor mistake without making it worse. You may be directed to return to the stop by going around the block; another bus may be able to pick up the child that morning;

or the parent may volunteer to take the child to school that day.

As a school bus driver, failure to promptly and honestly report a problem or incident can quickly turn a minor mistake into a major disaster.

1.2.4 Flexibility. The typical school bus garage is a whirlwind of constant change. Student address changes, babysitter changes, newly entering students, students going home with friends, temporary or permanent additions or deletions to routes, bus switches due to repairs or service — daily, even hourly, changes like these are standard operating procedure in any school bus operation today. Even small school districts process dozens of such changes every day.

Flexibility is a job requirement for school bus drivers — cooperation and problem-solving are the heart and soul of any well-run bus garage.

No one enjoys frequent disruptions in their work routine, but flexibility is an essential job requirement for a school bus driver. Cooperation and problem-solving are the heart and soul of any well-run bus garage. Each bus driver is only one part of a complex and interconnected system overseen by a dispatcher or supervisor. The overall mission of getting all children to and from school safely is what really matters in a bus garage. To that end, there will be times you are asked to drive a spare bus at a moment's notice. If another driver is running late, you may be asked to pick up part of that route. Your own

route may change at any point in the school year because of students moving in or out of the district or for a variety of other reasons.

Driving a school bus is not like sitting on an assembly line doing the same task day after day. The ability to handle change calmly and professionally is one secret of being a successful school bus driver.

The happiest school bus drivers also know the importance of keeping a sense of humor in the face of all these changes!

1.2.5 Confidentiality. As a school bus driver you will have access to personal information about students and their families. Student names, ages, and addresses, home and emergency phone numbers, and even information about a student's special needs or medical condition may be provided to you. All information about students and their families should be considered strictly confidential and should not be discussed with others except in case of an emergency. (Information that could protect a child in an emergency *can* be shared with those with a legitimate need to know.)

1.3 Physical and Mental Readiness for the Job

1.3.1 Physical readiness. You must pass the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles or federal Department of Transportation medical exam for bus drivers *before* transporting students. The first section of the medical exam form requires you to describe your medical history as well as any current health conditions and any medications you are taking. You must complete the medical form accurately and honestly. Failure to reveal a current or previous health problem on the medical form is falsifying a government

document – a potential felony. Worse, withholding information about your medical problems could place children at risk. No matter how badly you want to drive a school bus, lying about your medical history is not worth it.

No matter how much you want to drive a school bus, withholding information about your medical history to pass the physical exam is not worth it.

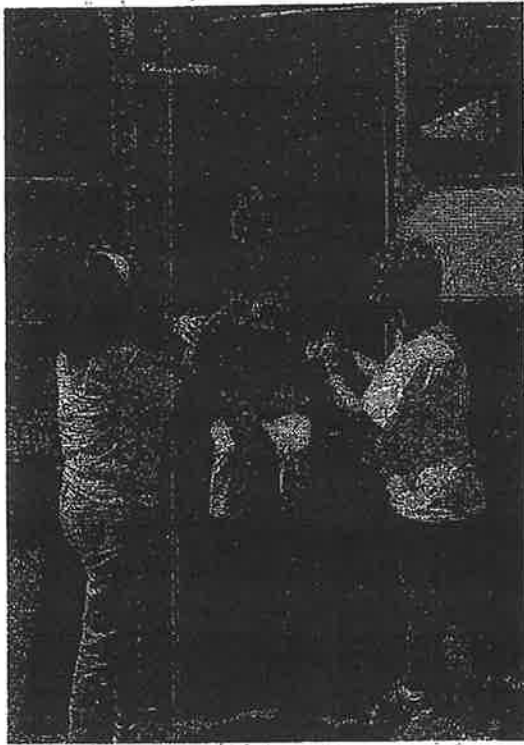
School bus drivers are not allowed to select which physician conducts their medical exam. The exam must be conducted by or under the direction of a physician or advanced practice nurse authorized by the school district.

The New York State Education Department requires school bus drivers to pass a medical exam at least once every thirteen months.

You may be asked to undergo follow-up exams to monitor your blood pressure, diabetic condition, or other health concern. Follow-up exams are typically scheduled every three months or six months. Unlike the complete medical exam required every thirteen months, follow-up exams may be conducted by your personal physician instead of the school doctor. ~~Both~~ *both* your, responsibility and your supervisor's responsibility to make sure you have all required follow-ups within the specified time frame. You are breaking the law if you continue driving school bus without taking a scheduled follow-up medical exam.

The examining physician may require you to wear corrective lenses (glasses or contacts) while driving school bus, even if you aren't required to wear them while driving your personal vehicle. If corrective lenses are indicated as required on your medical exam form, you *must* wear them whenever you drive a school bus.

You must also pass the New York State Education Department "Physical Performance Test" (PPT) before transporting students, and every 24 months afterwards. The PPT consists



of a set of simple physical tasks designed to demonstrate that you can operate a bus under normal conditions, and that you are also capable of responding quickly in an emergency.

Use caution to avoid an injury during your PPT. You will be directed to drag a heavy object the length of a bus, and to exit through the rear emergency door of a bus. These tasks

test your ability to quickly evacuate students in an emergency. If you have back problems or other physical concerns that could result in an injury, inform the person conducting the PPT before you start the test.

The person conducting your test can suggest ways to reduce the chance of an injury. For instance, it is best to use the muscles in your legs, not your back, when dragging a heavy object. Use both hands to pull, and once you get the object moving, keep going. Starting and stopping and starting again is much harder than one steady pull.

To avoid an injury when going out the rear emergency door, be aware that it's a long way down – more than three feet on most buses. If you jump you could twist your ankle. It is much safer to "sit and slide" from the floor at the exit. Use your hands and arms to support you as you slide to the ground.

Be aware of the low headroom at the emergency doors – don't bump your head as you go out. Make sure the door handle and latch don't snag your clothes as you exit.

You must re-take a PPT after any absence from duty of 60 or more calendar days (other than the typical summer layoff). The absence could be because of a medical leave or other personal matter. The "return-to-duty" PPT is identical to the regular test.

1.3.2 Proper Dress. The way that you dress for work not only can reflect your professionalism, it can also protect you from injury on the job. Sturdy footwear is key to protecting yourself from trips and falls. Shoes with soles that provide good traction and grip are essential. Shoes with open toes or high heels are not acceptable. Avoid hanging jewelry and long loose hair that that could be grabbed by children.

Dress neatly. Dressing the part of a professional school bus driver will affect the way the children respect and interact with you. Avoid provocative clothing that reveals too much cleavage, mid-section of legs. Do not wear any items of clothing with colors, messages, or logos that could be considered gang-related or represent alcohol, drug or cigarette manufacturers or themes.

1.3.3 Use of alcohol or drugs. It is against the law to drive a school bus under the influence of alcohol. The responsibility is too serious and the job is too challenging to attempt it while impaired in any way. You must be free of alcohol for at least six hours before going on duty. This means you cannot legally drive a school bus if you have an alcoholic drink at midnight and are scheduled to start work at 6:00 a.m. that morning.

If you do use alcohol in your personal life, the safest philosophy is to limit your drinking to Friday night or Saturday. Even then, be responsible. Don't drink and drive. What you do in your personal life can affect your ability to continue driving school bus. A single "Driving While Intoxicated" (DWI) conviction in your personal vehicle could mean losing your job as a school bus driver. Many school districts and bus companies have established a "zero tolerance" policy regarding DWI's.

What you do in your personal life can affect your ability to continue driving school bus.

All school bus drivers are subject to alcohol testing. You may be tested whenever you are on duty. A positive test could mean the end of your career as a school bus driver.

The use of illegal drugs is prohibited. All school bus drivers are subject to drug testing.

School bus drivers cannot refuse to be tested for drugs or alcohol. A refusal is considered a positive test and will result in the loss of your CDL.

1.3.4 Personal medications. Some personal medications can impair your ability to drive and should not be used while driving a school bus.

It is your responsibility to check the warnings on any medications you are currently using. This includes both prescription medications and common over-the-counter products such as cold and flu medications. If the warning label states: "Do not operate machinery while taking this medication," or "Do not drive while taking this medication," you cannot drive school bus while using it.

Ask your personal doctor or the pharmacist where you purchased the medication if it is safe to drive school bus while using it.

1.3.5 Adequate rest. Driving a school bus is a demanding job. Trying to do it when you are tired or sleepy is a recipe for disaster. This is only common sense.

The New York State Department of Transportation requires at least eight hours of rest between your previous day's tour of duty and returning to duty the next day. This means you cannot drive school bus at 6:00 a.m. if you returned from a sports trip at 11:00 p.m. the night before.

It is not safe to return to drive if you did not get enough sleep. If you were up all night with a family emergency, are you really able to concentrate on driving a school bus the next morning? The stakes are too high to risk driving if you're not rested and alert.

It is also against the law to drive a school bus more than ten hours in one day. It is both your responsibility and your supervisor's responsibility to make sure you are not assigned a long trip that exceeds this limit. A second driver may need to accompany you on a long trip.

Even if you are not driving the whole time, it is also against the law to be "on duty" for more than fifteen hours in a single day. "On duty" means being responsible for your bus – whether you are driving it or it is parked. For instance, if you drop students off at a destination and then stay with the bus to make sure it isn't vandalized or tampered with, you are still on duty. To be considered "off duty", you need to have access to a location where you can actually rest, or a written waiver from your supervisor specifically relieving you from all responsibilities for a designated period while parked at the destination site.

Take the driving hours laws seriously. They protect students and they protect you. If you have an accident and it's determined that you exceeded the "driving hours" or "on duty hours" limits, you could be subject to legal sanctions or even personal liability.

1.4 Your Responsibility to Model Mature Behavior with Students

1.4.1 Self-control. Driving a large commercial vehicle over congested roadways is challenging – but for a school bus driver, it's often not the hardest part of the job. Working with children can be gratifying, and if you don't enjoy being around children you're probably not cut out for driving a school bus. But anyone who works with

children every day will tell you it can also be exasperating at times.

**For a school bus driver,
driving the bus is often not
the hardest part of the job.**

The ability to maintain emotional self-control when dealing with student behavior problems is a job requirement for school bus drivers. No matter what students say or do, you are the adult in charge. You are responsible for acting like an adult.

Of course, you have the right and responsibility to protect other students or yourself from a violent student. But losing your temper with children is never acceptable.

Unacceptable acts towards students include:

- Slapping or striking a student.
- Cursing at students – even "mild" cursing, such as "hell" or "damn".
- Threatening a student or a student's family in any way.
- Pushing or shoving a student into the seat because he or she won't sit down.
- Screaming at students.
- Belittling or making fun of students or their families.
- Grabbing a student by the arm, shoulder, hair, ear, or clothing.
- Kicking at a student's feet or legs to move them out of the aisle.
- Hitting the brakes hard ("jacking the brakes") to make students sit down.

- Forcing a misbehaving student off your bus at a location other than the approved stop as a punishment.
- Holding a student onboard your bus past the regular stop as a punishment.
- Searching students' bookbags or other personal belongings.

Depending on the circumstances, any of the above acts could mean losing your job. Some could result in criminal charges against you, or even personal liability.

In Unit 2 you will learn specific strategies for managing difficult students. Schools have many resources for helping you with student behavior problems.

Driving a school bus is not just another job. It takes more than the ability to handle a large vehicle. Being responsible for children is a serious matter. Emotional maturity, especially the ability to control your temper when working with challenging students, is essential.

Driving a school bus is not just another job — being responsible for children is a serious matter.

1.4.2 Tolerance. As a school bus driver, you will serve families from every corner of your community. You will work with children from a wide variety of social, economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. You will encounter many types of personalities every day. You will interact with children and adults whose political opinions, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or cultural tastes are very different from yours. You will have the opportunity to work with bus drivers and

other transportation staff from a wide variety of backgrounds. You'll get to know children with mental, physical, and emotional disabilities or medical conditions that you may never have heard of.

New York is an incredibly diverse state. Tolerance for people's differences is a job requirement for a school bus driver in today's world. As a school bus driver, you are a role model 100% of the time. By consistently demonstrating respect, civility, compassion, kindness, and understanding towards everyone you deal with, you can set a powerful example to the students on your bus. It's a chance to show young people what citizenship means in today's complex world.

1.5 Knowledge of Laws and Policies

1.5.1 State and federal laws. School bus safety is governed by both federal and state agencies. School bus drivers are subject to many "school bus-specific" laws and regulations that go well beyond what the average motorist must abide by. It is your responsibility to learn and follow all school bus laws and regulations.

Examples of school bus laws and regulations that exceed the requirements for other motorists include:

- Regardless of the posted speed, New York State school buses ~~cannot exceed~~ 55 mph when transporting students.
- It is against the law to let a school bus idle longer than five minutes (three minutes in New York City) except in cases of severe cold.
- It is against the law to turn right on red when transporting students.

background check upon hire; once driving school bus, you will be continuously monitored by both the New York Division of Criminal Justice Services and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for any criminal violations that could disqualify you from driving a school bus.

- Driving record review – you cannot drive a school bus in New York State if you have
- a poor driving record in your personal vehicle. Traffic violations adding up to fine or more points on your license, whether “earned” in your personal vehicle or a bus, result in an automatic disqualification. Many school districts and bus companies are stricter than the state.
- Defensive driving performance review – at least once every 12 months you must be observed by a Certified Examiner while transporting students; the observation must be discussed with you.

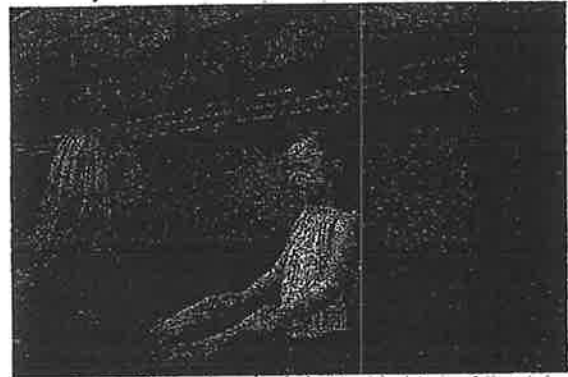
At least once every 12 months you must be observed by a Certified Examiner while transporting students.

- Annual review – your overall driving record must be reviewed by your employer every 12 months; school bus drivers must promptly report accidents, traffic violations, and license suspensions to their employer.

1.7 Professional Standards of a New York State School Bus Driver

The professional standards expected of a New York State school bus driver are summarized on the next page. Read them carefully and keep them in mind every day as you embark on your challenging and important new career.

No parent wants a bus driver with compromised moral standards to transport his or her child.



PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF THE NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER

As a professional school bus driver...

I will:

- Always place student safety first.
- Do what I can to protect a child just as a responsible parent would in similar circumstances.
- Exercise sound safety judgment when confronted with an unforeseen situation.
- Drive defensively at all times.
- Stay focused on safe driving in spite of distractions.
- Perform a professional pre-trip, carefully inspecting every vehicle I drive every day to make sure it is safe before transporting children.
- Account for every child assigned to my bus, including completing a professional post-trip to check for sleeping or hiding children left on board at the end of my run.
- Conduct myself in a mature and professional manner at all times in matters of language, appearance and hygiene, cleanliness of the bus, and emotional self-control.
- Be reliable and punctual.
- Be honest and promptly report any incident, accident, problem, or mistake.
- Treat information about students and students' families as confidential.
- Arrive for work physically and mentally prepared for my responsibilities.
- Demonstrate flexibility regarding route changes and vehicle assignments.
- Treat children, parents, school personnel, and co-workers with tolerance, compassion, civility, and respect regardless of background.
- Learn and abide by all federal, state, and local school bus laws, regulations, recommendations, and policies.

I will not:

- Knowingly ignore any situation that could place a child at risk.
- Change a route or bus stop without authorization.
- Attempt to transport students when impaired by drugs, alcohol, personal medication, or fatigue.

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- It is against the law to eat or drink while transporting students.
- School buses transporting students must have headlights on at all times.
- School buses must stop at all railroad crossings, with or without students on board, unless directed across the tracks by a police officer, or if the crossing is controlled by a traffic light or posted as "Exempt."

You will learn about other important school bus laws and regulations throughout the *Pre-Service Course*. But this course is only an introduction to laws and regulations. You will be required to take a more in-depth safety course, known as the *Basic Course*. You must complete the *Basic Course* within your first year of employment as a school bus driver. The *Basic Course* will provide you with much more information about laws and regulations.

New school bus laws and regulations are enacted every year. There are many ways to stay up to date. Keep an eye out for news stories about new laws. Updates may be posted on your department bulletin board. School bus magazines and websites can be helpful – ask your supervisor or School Bus Driver Instructor (SBDI) for suggestions about which ones to check out. Annual compilations of school bus laws are also available.

1.5.2 Local policies. School districts and bus companies can exceed state or federal safety requirements. Local policies and procedures are often more strict than state or federal laws. For instance, the New York State Education Department requires school bus drivers (as well as attendants and monitors) to attend two refresher safety training sessions every school year. However, many school districts and bus companies require additional annual in-service training.

Other areas where school districts and bus companies often enact policies stricter than state or federal requirements include:

- **Student seat belt use.** Although all New York State school buses are equipped with lap belts for students, it is up to each school district to decide whether they must be used. (Regardless of local policy, students must always wear seat belts in small school buses and school vehicles.) Ask your supervisor about your school's policy regarding student use of seat belts.
- **Hazardous roadways.** School districts can prohibit crossovers on dangerous roadways or declare unusually hazardous roads off limits to school buses altogether. Ask your router or supervisor if there are any restricted roads in your district.
- **Field trip policy.** Some bus companies and school districts require the bus and bus driver to stay at the destination for the duration of a trip. Others give the driver the discretion of traveling a short distance from the site for lunch or a rest break. Find out what your operation's policy is.

It is very important that you know and abide by your school district's or bus company's safety policies and procedures at all times. Read your department's policies and procedures handbook carefully. Ask your supervisor or SBDI about anything in the handbook that isn't clear.

Read your department's "policies and procedures handbook" carefully.

1.6 Testing and Monitoring Requirements

1.6.1 Testing. To become a school bus driver in New York State, you must first pass a number of pre-employment tests. As you take this course you may have already taken some or all of these tests. If you haven't yet, you will soon. The purpose of pre-employment tests is to make sure you possess the skills and knowledge necessary to begin transporting children safely. Mandatory pre-employment tests include:

- Pre-employment drug test.
- Commercial Driver's License (CDL)
- Permit written knowledge tests.
- CDL road test.
- Medical exam.
- Physical Performance Test.
- *Pre-Service Course* Final Exam – a final exam is administered at the completion of this course.

Your school district or bus company may require additional tests before allowing you to transport students. For instance, some school districts and private contractors require new school bus drivers to pass an in-house road test, in addition to passing the NYS DMV's CDL road test, prior to transporting students.

Once you've begun transporting students, you will be subject to a variety of follow-up tests. Some tests are required annually, some every two years, and some on a random basis. Periodic testing ensures all New York State school bus drivers maintain the skills, knowledge, and professional standards required to safely transport children.

These tests include:

- Drug and alcohol tests – all school bus drivers are subject to random drug and alcohol tests; you may also be tested if your supervisor suspects you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or if you've been involved in an accident.
- Medical exams – at least once every 13 months; the school's physician may require more frequent exams.
- Physical Performance Test – at least once every 24 months.
- Behind-the-wheel road test – at least once every 24 months.
- Written knowledge test – at least once every 24 months.
- *Basic Course* Final Exam – a final exam is administered at the completion of the
- *Basic Course*, which you must complete within your first year as a school bus driver.

The above tests are the minimum required by New York State. Schools and bus companies may require additional tests.

1.6.2 Monitoring. School bus drivers in New York State are subject to continuous monitoring both on and off the job. What you do in your personal vehicle and personal life impacts your ability to continue driving school bus. No parent wants a bus driver with a pattern of disregard for safety or compromised moral standards to transport his or her child.

Some of the ways school bus drivers are monitored include:

- Criminal history check – all school bus drivers in New York State are fingerprinted and subject to a criminal

1.8 Unit 1 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

1. Complete the following sentence from the list below: *No matter what happens, your main priority as a school bus driver is...*

- a. ...staying on schedule.
- b. ...keeping parents happy.
- ☒ c. ...protecting the students.
- d. ...keeping peace with the students.

2. Complete the following sentence in the space below: *To be treated as a professional, you must act like a... Professional*

3. **TRUE** or **FALSE**? "Some medications are unsafe to use while driving bus."

4. Which statement about fatigue below is **not** true?

- a. You can legally drive school bus at 6:00 a.m. if you returned from a sports trip at 11:00 p.m. the night before.
- b. It is against the law to drive school bus more than ten hours in a single day.
- c. It is against the law to be on duty for more than fifteen hours in a single day.
- d. Trying to drive a school bus when you're tired is a recipe for disaster.

5. Which of the following actions are **unacceptable** for a school bus driver?

- a. Hitting the brakes hard to make the students sit down.
- b. Telling a student that the reason he keeps littering your bus is probably because his family lives in a filthy trailer.
- c. "Helping" a misbehaving student into his seat by pushing him down by his shoulders.

☒ d. All of the above actions are unacceptable

6. **TRUE** or **FALSE**? "New York is a diverse state – tolerance for people's differences is a job requirement for a school bus driver in today's world."

7. Which statement about school bus laws and regulations below is **not** true?

- a. It is your responsibility to learn and abide by school bus laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.
- b. Local policies and procedures can be stricter than state or federal laws.
- c. School bus laws and regulations seldom change.
- d. School bus safety is governed by both federal and state laws.

8. **TRUE** or **FALSE**? "School bus drivers in New York State are subject to continuous monitoring of their ethics and driving record both on and off the job."

UNIT 1 NOTES & QUESTIONS

CORE UNIT 2: STUDENT MANAGEMENT

Unit 2 Topics

- 2.1 Getting the Best Out of Children
- 2.2 Handling Persistent Behavior Problems
- 2.3 Bullying, Threats, and Fights
- 2.4 Relating to Students as a Substitute Driver
- 2.5 Unit 2 Review

Introduction

Working with children can be very gratifying, but anyone who does it every day knows children can test your patience. As a school bus driver, you will face the unique challenge of managing the behavior of dozens of children at once – while you are driving.

Unit 2 will introduce you to simple and effective techniques for managing student behavior. Learning from the experiences of other school bus drivers can be very helpful. Many school bus drivers are skilled at getting the best out of children.

This unit will also prepare you to handle severe behavior problems, such as fights and bullying.

2.1 Getting the Best Out of Children

2.1.1 A positive approach usually works best. Successful school bus drivers look for ways to encourage safe and responsible student behavior. A positive approach is usually the most effective way to bring out a cooperative spirit in children, just as it is with adults.

A positive approach starts the first day you drive a route. Make a point of greeting every child who boards your bus. A smile and a simple “good morning” can make a big difference to a child. Even teenagers presenting as cool and aloof notice when adults greet them in a friendly manner and treat them with respect. (Don’t take it personally if you don’t get a “good morning” back at first – patience is a job requirement when working with teens.)

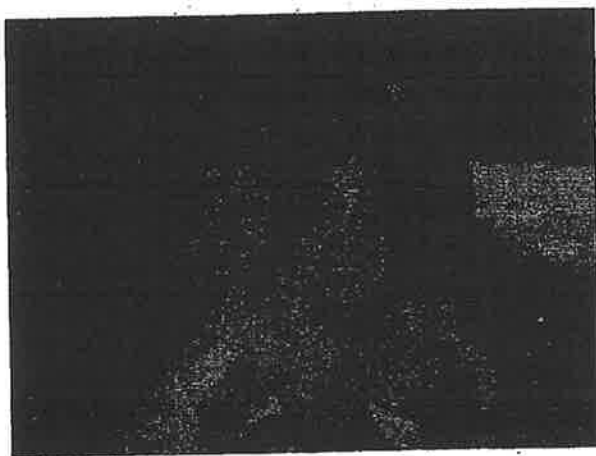
Make your safety expectations clear from the first day you drive a route, and follow up with daily reminders.

It is important to get to know your students. Children are more likely to misbehave when they feel they are anonymous. Learn their names as soon as you can. Show an interest in what they’re interested in. A simple question about school, sports, or a family pet can help you get to know a child. Make a habit of chatting with children whenever you have a few minutes of “sit time,” such as waiting to release them into school in the morning.

In the afternoon, greet students as they are boarding your bus at school for the ride home.

Try to make eye contact with every child as they come up the bus steps. Make it a point to interact with students – don't just sit in your seat.

Once they're all seated, stand up for a moment and face your students before leaving school grounds. Put a positive spin on the ride ahead with a friendly, but emphatic, reminder about the importance of safe behavior. Make your safety expectations clear from the first day you drive a route, and follow up with daily reminders. Even bus rules can be taught in a positive manner. Show students you care about safety, and show them you are in charge.



Of course, kids are kids. Many will forget the rules from time to time, and some will deliberately test them. It was probably no different "back in the day" when you were in school; perhaps you weren't a perfect bus rider either. Every bus driver has to contend with potentially disruptive behavior from time to time. But most children don't like a loud or out-of-control bus any more than adults do. Children who feel threatened or insecure on their morning ride to school are seldom in the right frame of mind for learning once they get to school. All children deserve a safe and

pleasant bus ride. Build trust by letting children know you take their safety seriously. Establishing positive relationships with your students is the key to manageable behavior.

As with adults, constant negativity seldom improves children's behavior. Instead of nagging, look for and recognize safe behavior. Whenever possible, "catch them being good". If students are staying seated properly, or keeping their voices low, point it out and thank them. Praise can be remarkably effective with children – especially with children who have previously misbehaved.

When your efforts pay off and the behavior of your riders begins to improve, let them know how proud you are of them. Successful school bus drivers are always looking for little ways to reinforce positive behavior – stickers, notes, positive calls to parents (if permitted by local policy), etc., can all be effective. Be creative – show students how much you appreciate it when they follow the rules. (However, don't give students food treats as good behavior rewards without school approval. Many children have serious food allergies.)

Some school districts have established more formal programs for reinforcing safe behavior, such as "mature bus behavior" certificates, ice cream coupons, "Bus of the Month" awards, and the like. Find out if your school district or bus company has such a program.

2.1.2 Actions speak louder than words.

Children watch adults closely. School bus drivers often make a lasting impression on the children they transport.

As any parent knows, being a role model to children isn't always easy. It requires a high degree of maturity and self-control. Even young children don't miss much. For instance, openly venting your anger when a

motorist does something foolish around your bus sets a poor example for your children. (It could also result in a dangerous road rage incident.)

Children watch adults closely – being a role model requires a high degree of maturity and self-control.

Create a climate of mutual respect on your bus by modeling a courteous and civil attitude towards others. Little things, such as your consistent use of “please” and “thank you,” can make a big difference in how children think of the bus ride. Build a sense of cooperation and teamwork, and encourage students to take ownership for their behavior, by using phrases like “our bus” instead of just “my bus.” Children with inadequate guidance at home may especially benefit from seeing how a responsible adult interacts with others.

Children don’t expect adults to be perfect, but they do expect honesty. One way to demonstrate personal responsibility to children is to admit when you make a mistake. For instance, if you mistakenly call out the wrong student for violating a bus rule, a simple apology goes a long way to building trust and mutual respect.

2.1.3 Teaching and enforcing safety rules.

Safety rules for students should be posted inside every bus and are usually distributed to all students at the start of the school year. But a poster full of rules means little unless they are explained to students, and consistently and fairly enforced.

Bus rules vary from school district to school district. Learn your district’s well enough that you can readily explain them in your own words. Like adults, children remember rules best when they understand the safety reasons behind them. Be able to discuss, at the child’s level, “why” each rule is important for safety. Briefly go over the most important rules with all your students the first day you drive a run.

School bus drivers have many opportunities to teach students safety rules. State Education Law requires all students to receive at least three bus drills each year. Drills have two goals: to reinforce safe ridership behaviors, and to prepare students for a sudden emergency.

Like adults, children remember rules best when they understand the “why’s” behind them.

Drills are usually scheduled in advance through the transportation office. They must take place on school grounds. There are many ways to go over safety rules with children – find an approach that suits your personality.

Regardless of your communication style, strong student control is imperative during drills. Set the right tone by introducing the drill with a touch of formality. Stand and face your students before starting the drill. Briefly remind them of the seriousness of the exercise they are about to participate in. Point out that bus drills are required by state law and that their purpose is to make sure every child knows what to do in an emergency. Let them know that you expect every child to pay attention throughout the drill. Students learn

little if they are allowed to horse around during the drill.

Student safety must be paramount during the drill. Horseplay can result in an injury. Make sure your bus is properly secured before starting the drill. Shut the bus off and take the key with you before getting out of your seat.

Do not let students push and shove during the practice evacuation. Most importantly, never allow students to *jump* out the emergency door. Emphasize this rule before starting the evacuation. Jumping from an emergency door can result in a sprained or broken ankle. It's a long way down. "Sitting and sliding" from the exit is much safer.

Children learn best when they are actively involved. Instead of just lecturing about safety rules, ask "why" questions:

"Why don't we allow eating on the bus?"

"Why do you need to know where every exit is located?"

"Why is it important to stay seated when the bus is moving?"

Maintain student control, but keep the drill as hands-on as possible. Instead of just talking about emergency exits, have students point them all out. Let older students demonstrate how to open each exit. Don't forget to cover the passenger door – it might be the best way out in a real emergency. Opening passenger doors can be tricky if you don't know how. If your bus has a power door, make sure children know where the emergency override control is located.

Bus drills are important, but daily reminders are the most effective way to teach children safety rules. Be a safety advocate – show them you enjoy talking about it. Gradually, your enthusiasm will sink in. For instance, use "sit time" before releasing students into school in the morning to quiz them about safety

procedures. Young children love the chance to show adults what they know. Be creative – make a game of it. Children learn best when it's fun.

Daily reminders are not optional. State law requires school bus drivers to provide daily safety instruction to children who must cross the road. This means you must remind every child every day. You will learn much more about protecting students at bus stops in Unit 3.

2.1.4 Assigned seats. One way to reduce behavior problems is to assign seats. Squabbles between children about where to sit and who to sit with are one of the most common causes of behavior problems on school buses.

There are many advantages to assigned seats. Most importantly, it establishes a more controlled, orderly environment on your bus. Assigning seats is a tangible illustration to children that the adult is in charge. It also helps drivers learn their students' names more quickly.

There are many advantages to assigned seats. Most children feel more secure knowing where they will sit every day.

Although some children may complain at first, many actually prefer knowing where they will sit every day. Trying to find a seat, especially when the bus is nearly full, can be very unnerving to young or insecure children.

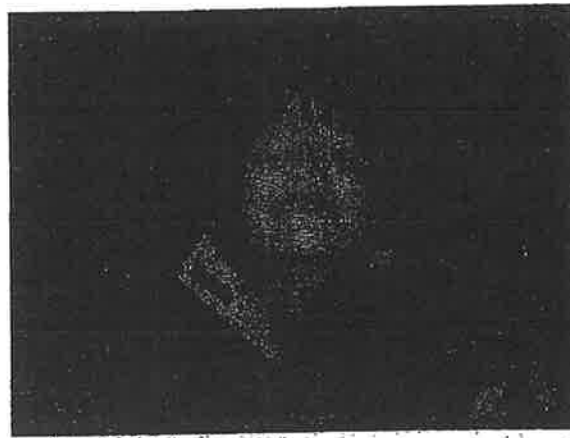
Assigning seats also emphasizes student accountability. It is easier to determine who wrote on a seat when you know which students are assigned to sit there every day. In an emergency, quickly accounting for all children is critical. Knowing where children were seated helps confirm who was on board when the incident occurred.

There are many ways to assign seats. Placing younger and more vulnerable students in the front rows lets you keep an eye on them. Letting students be involved in picking their assigned seats can keep it from seeming like a punishment. You may need to reassign seats occasionally during the year as new children come onto your route, or because those "inseparable best friends" on the first day of school suddenly can't stand each other.

2.1.5 Realistic expectations. Children are children and it's important to have realistic expectations about behavior. As a school bus driver, you will be dealing with children of a wide variety of ages. Adjusting expectations according to children's developmental level is the best way to guide behavior.

Many young children, for instance, have a lot of pent-up energy, especially on the ride home in the afternoon. Asking young children to completely refrain from talking is unrealistic and unfair. Instead of demanding absolute silence, concentrate on teaching young children to use their quieter "bus voices." Find ways to redirect their energies into safer behaviors, such as looking for animals in the surrounding countryside, or counting red cars. Age-appropriate books or coloring books can help keep young children occupied during the bus ride.

Teenagers are usually more cooperative when they are addressed as adults. The best way to get respect from older students is to give it.



Overreacting to minor rule infractions usually backfires. If older students really want to make an adult's life miserable, they'll find a way to do so. For a pleasant and safe bus ride, you need your students' cooperation. Older students want a safe ride too.

Knowing when to draw the line about rule violations is essential. Pick your battles. Serious safety infractions, such as refusing to stay seated, threatening another student or the driver, damaging seats, or refusing to cross the road safely, must be dealt with at once. Intervene quickly, calmly, and seriously. Safety cannot be compromised. But less severe infractions, such as talking too loud or feet in the aisle, are often best handled by a gentle reminder or subtle redirection. Once you've established a strong, positive relationship with students, an occasional dose of "bus driver eye" – a brief, focused, silent glance – is often all that's needed to subdue a child who is tempted to misbehave.

Sometimes the best way to eliminate a minor behavior problem is by ignoring it. Some children seek the attention of their peers by drawing adults into arguments. Don't let yourself be lured into a conflict spiral with a child who loves drama and knows how to push your buttons. Knowing when to say nothing is one key to student management.

Like adults, children are not perfect. Most will misbehave from time to time, and a few will do so frequently. But all children deserve understanding and patience. Don't hold a grudge. If a child was a problem yesterday on your bus, let today be a new day. Greet the child as you do every other child.

Children face enough negativity in today's world – don't add to it. Never forget that your smile at the bus stop in the morning will be the first smile some children see that day.

Bus drivers can have a powerful positive impact on children's lives. Many New York State school bus drivers have learned how to communicate with troubled students and never stop encouraging them to get on track. The heart of being a school bus driver is finding ways to get the best out of all children.

2.2 Handling Persistent Behavior Problems

2.2.1 Effective warnings. Student management on a school bus is not easy. Even the most successful bus drivers have moments when they feel like they're losing control. Or, you may be newly assigned to a run that came with a well-deserved reputation for persistent behavior problems.

Handling a generally out-of-control or too loud bus load of students: The noise level of an out-of-control bus can be extremely distracting. In severe cases it can be so distracting it's difficult to drive safely.

Responding effectively to an out-of-control bus is challenging. It's hard to know where to start when it seems like every student on the bus is misbehaving at once. As children try to out-shout each other, the energy level ratchets up. Even children who usually ride peacefully may jump on the bandwagon. More severe

behavior problems, such as jumping from seat to seat, teasing, throwing pencils or other items, etc., can quickly take root in the chaos.

You need to be able to regain control of your bus without losing control of your temper.

Trying to calm down dozens of loud and excited children can be intimidating. You need to be able to regain control of your bus without losing control of your temper.

If you're on your route when behavior problems escalate to the point that you cannot concentrate on driving, look for a safe place to pull off the road. Make sure you get well off the road. ~~Never stop your bus in or near the roadway, where it could be struck by another vehicle.~~ Be alert for soft shoulders (gravel, mud, or snow) that could give way under the weight of your bus. Activate your four-way flashers (not your student flashers). Once you're stopped, secure the bus with the parking brake. It's a good idea to notify base by radio at this point (or cell phone, if school policy allows its use when you're stopped) that you've pulled over temporarily to handle a discipline problem. Sometimes the mere act of contacting base will begin to calm children down.

In the afternoon, if students already seem unusually wound up as they board your bus (perhaps from something that happened in school that day, or because the weather's turned beautiful and the energy level is high), don't start on your route. They may calm down on their own – but they may not. ~~Instead,~~ stay put on school grounds. If

necessary, pull your bus over so other buses in the lineup can get past you.

A loud bus can make anyone's blood pressure rise, but staying calm is essential if you want to regain control. Trying to out-shout raucous children usually makes things worse. If you lose your temper, you will also lose the respect of your students. An angry bus driver can easily terrify younger passengers, who may already feel vulnerable because of the noise level and behavior of the older students.

Instead of immediately standing up and confronting an unruly group of students, just stay in your seat for a short period. Maintain your composure. If you can manage a quiet smile, so much the better. It won't take long for students to realize the bus isn't going anywhere; but don't expect the bus to go silent instantly. Students who were enjoying the action may try to keep things stirred up a bit longer. You may hear shouts of "let's get going," "just drive the bus," or something worse.

Most children hate a loud bus as much as you do, and most really want to get going. Usually, most of your students will begin to quiet down after a minute or so. Once it's calm enough that they can actually hear what you're saying, speak to them in a normal, friendly tone.

Don't be sarcastic about how they were behaving— it's like pouring gas on a smoldering fire. Don't tell students you're not moving the bus until it's "absolutely quiet" — it puts too much power in students' hands. A few defiant students can call your bluff and keep the bus stopped (and the attention of their peers on them) for as long as they want. Don't make ominous threats — for example, "we'll just sit here until it's dark." You can seriously frighten younger students, who may take the

threat literally. Scare tactics also undermine your credibility with older students. They are smart enough to know when you've made a threat you can't follow through on.

Don't tell students you're not moving the bus until it's "absolutely quiet" — it puts too much power in students' hands. A single defiant student can call your bluff.

Instead of trying to intimidate your passengers, calmly explain that you simply cannot drive safely when they're too loud or when they're out of their seats. Don't show students you're rattled, even if you are. Rather than venting your emotions, be reassuring — it's the best way to bring excited children back to earth. Stay as professional and as positive as you can.

When students have quieted down for the most part, and are staying in their seats, you may be able to continue on your run. Don't expect perfection at this point.

Make sure you are calm enough to drive safely. Take a deep breath before resuming your run. Double-check the status of lights and gauges before starting out. Notify base by radio that you're back on the road. Check your mirrors carefully before moving the bus.

Once you're moving, it's wise to thank students for calming down — even if their behavior is still far from perfect. Reestablishing rapport is the best insurance against losing control again. Use your "bus driver eye" and emphatic verbal warnings as

necessary to keep a lid on behavior for the rest of the ride.

Whenever possible, avoid dramatic confrontations and demands that wind up giving the misbehaving student control of what happens.

When you've completed the run, go over what happened with your supervisor. If your bus is equipped with a video system, review the footage together. If it's possible to identify the individual student(s) who were most responsible for stirring up the others, write them up. (See Section 2.2.2, "Using referrals effectively," below.)

Handling defiant individuals or small groups of defiant students: If, in spite of verbal warnings, a few children won't calm down, or two "frenemies" won't stop arguing with each other, separate them. You have the right to assign seats. Try to move the students several rows apart.

If a student refuses to move to another seat, stay calm. Don't argue with defiant students. (Never attempt to drag or push a student into a seat.) Calmly tell them they have a choice—comply with your request, or be written up after the run. Don't paint yourself into a corner by demanding they move "this instant." Instead, back off and give them time to respond. It's far more effective to let them save face in front of their peers at this point than to ratchet up the confrontation.

If a student still won't move, but does tone down the inappropriate behavior enough that

you can drive safely, leave the situation as is for the moment and continue on the run. Whenever possible, avoid dramatic confrontations and demands that wind up giving the misbehaving student control of what happens. Your job is not to punish children but to maintain reasonable behavior on the bus. Rely on psychology instead of force. Try to stay one step ahead of children who are showing off for their peers. You are the adult.

When you've finished the route, report any students who openly defied your authority. If a defiant student does not have consequences, others may follow their example.

If a student or students simply won't calm down enough to let you drive safely, you may need assistance. Inform base of the situation. Do not give the names of students over the radio except in case of emergency. Your dispatcher may tell you to take down the names of the problem students. This alone may get their attention and convince them to settle down. In extreme cases, a defiant student may need to be removed from your bus during the route.

Do not call for outside intervention lightly. Repeatedly taking your bus back to school so the principal can talk to students, for instance, can have the unintended consequence of undermining your own authority with them. There's no shame in asking for help when you really need it, but whenever possible, it's best to show students you can handle behavior problems on your own.

2.2.2 Using referrals effectively: Most schools use a written referral system for handling serious or repeated violations of bus rules.

Referrals must be used correctly. Accuracy is absolutely essential. Don't write up a child

based on a guess about what happened. Don't hint that you saw or heard something if you didn't. Bus referrals become part of a child's educational record. Understandably, parents don't appreciate having their child accused of something he or she didn't do.

In most cases, a referral should be filed only as a last resort, after other behavior management efforts have failed.

Legibility is essential. If the principal cannot decipher your handwriting, the referral probably won't be acted on.

Be selective. Use referrals sparingly, for violations of important safety rules, not to report merely irritating behavior or minor problems that you could have solved on your own by talking to the child.

In most cases, a student should be written up only as a last resort after verbal warnings and other behavior management efforts, such as moving the child to another seat, have failed. However, with serious safety violations, such as outright defiance, violence or threats of violence, bullying or sexual harassment, drug or alcohol use, or refusal to board or exit the bus safely, a student should be reported after even a single incident. Written documentation is essential in cases of severe discipline problems.

When writing a bus referral, be as detailed as possible when describing what happened. Don't simply say a child "refused to follow the rules" – specifically identify which rule(s). Don't use a referral to write up "the whole bus" all at once out of frustration. This will

only undermine your credibility with administrators. A referral must be directed at the specific behavior problem of a specific student. Don't say a child "always" breaks a rule – specify when it happened. If obscenities or vulgar language were used, indicate exactly what was said on the referral.

Most importantly, explain how the child's behavior jeopardized safety. For instance, "Mary wouldn't stay in her seat – she could have been hurt if I had to stop fast," or "Jeff kept screaming – it distracted me as I was driving and could have led to an accident." If the child ignored previous warnings, say so. Give the principal who will contact the child's parents based on your referral the specific information needed to convince them of the accuracy and seriousness of the offense.

Idle or exaggerated threats undermine your credibility with students. Don't tell a child you're going to write them up and then not do so. Don't try to scare children by inflating the consequences of a referral – for instance, "if I write you up, you'll be off this bus the rest of the year!"

Students are entitled to "due process." This legal term means discipline must be administered fairly. Consequences for rule infractions should follow a series of progressively severe steps (exceptions may be made for severe violations).

Bus drivers cannot suspend students on their own. Suspensions, and any other type of student discipline, *must* be authorized by a school administrator. Never refuse to transport a child without the school's prior approval, or put a misbehaving child off your bus in the middle of a route. Either act represents a violation of your custodial responsibility for children assigned to your

route. In the worst case scenario, you could lose your job, or be charged with negligence.

Bus drivers cannot suspend students on their own. Suspensions, and any other type of student discipline, must be authorized by a school administrator.

Student disciplinary policies vary from school district to school district. A typical policy is a warning from the principal for a first offense, followed by a one day suspension for a second, followed by a three day suspension for a third. Ask your supervisor about your school's policy.

2.2.3 Video. Many school buses are equipped with video systems. Video cameras are very beneficial to student management. Their presence can be a deterrent. If an incident does take place on your bus, a video helps your supervisor or a principal sort out what happened.

There are many types of video systems. Some consist of a single camera mounted on the bulkhead above the driver. Other systems employ several camera heads throughout the bus to provide a better view of students. "Clever" students may try to hide from view behind seat backs. Some systems let you mark or "red flag" the video while driving (usually with a small button on your control panel) so it's easier to find an incident later.

Many video systems document the bus driver's actions as well as the students'. What you say to your students, or to a parent at a bus

stop, may be captured on video. Although being "on camera" at all times can be unsettling at first, video documentation protects bus drivers from allegations of improper conduct.

Many video systems also log bus speed, braking, warning light use, location, and other vehicle actions. Drivers who take safety seriously have nothing to fear from such documentation.

2.2.4 Five behavior management mistakes to avoid. Student management can be challenging – even for experienced school bus drivers. Out of frustration, bus drivers sometimes make the wrong decision about how to handle behavior problems. Learning from other drivers can help you avoid making the same mistakes. Behavior management mistakes to avoid include:

1. *Inconsistency.* The best way to win the cooperation of children on your bus is by setting clear, realistic behavior expectations and consistently following through on them. Fairness is very important to children. If you apply the rules differently depending on how much you like a particular child, or on your mood that day, children will notice.
2. *Too timid.* Until you really get to know them, interacting with dozens of children at once can be intimidating. The collective energy level of younger children on a bus can be overwhelming at first, and many teenagers have mastered the art of appearing sullen to any adult with authority. However, you are legally responsible for maintaining reasonable order on your bus. Don't let students run the show. Don't be anonymous – get to know your students as quickly as possible, and let them get to know you. Even if you're "the quiet type," find a way to let students know you are in charge. Win their trust by showing

them you take their safety seriously.

Demonstrate safety leadership. Intervene quickly to protect vulnerable children from being picked on and to prevent isolated behavior problems from spreading throughout the bus.

3. *Intimidation.* Attempting to frighten students into behaving – shouting or gesturing at them, etc. – is unacceptable. No parent wants his or her child to be verbally threatened by another adult. Deliberately embarrassing children – for instance, making fun of a child in front of the whole bus – does not improve behavior. Demeaning language is bullying and is unacceptable whether it's from children or adults.

4. *"Jacking the brakes."* Jeopardizing children's safety to "get their attention" is absolutely unacceptable regardless of how much they're misbehaving. Unnecessarily and unexpectedly braking hard to "remind" children to sit down is extremely dangerous. A sudden stop could throw a child out of the seat. A child could easily be hurt. You could be subject to discipline or even be sued.

5. *Distraction.* A school bus driver needs the presence of mind to maintain focus on the roadway environment outside the bus in spite of onboard distractions. School bus drivers must contend with many potential distractions. If you're not careful, even simple tasks such as talking on the two-way radio or adjusting a knob on the control panel can be distracting. Reading the route sheet while the bus is in motion is very dangerous.

Students are the most common distraction for school bus drivers. Addressing behavior problems while the bus is moving, or at a bus stop, is extremely dangerous – don't try it. The internal overhead mirror (mounted just above the driver on the bulkhead) has been called "the most dangerous piece of equipment

on a bus." Many accidents have been caused by a bus driver's misuse of this mirror. While the bus is moving, it should be used only for very brief glances at your passengers.

2.3 Bullying, Threats, and Fights

2.3.1 Bullying is devastating to children.

Bullying can have a serious, long-lasting, even tragic effect on children. Young children, children who are naturally timid, children with disabilities, and any child who is "different" in some way, are especially at risk. Bullying has a huge impact on school performance. A child who is afraid of a bully on the morning bus ride doesn't arrive at school in a learning frame of mind.

Many incidents of school violence are the result of bullying. Frustration over being continually picked on can push children toward violent revenge or suicide.

Unfortunately, the school bus can be an ideal medium for bullying.

Bullying is not just "kids being kids."

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, "A bully is someone who directs physical, verbal, or psychological aggression or harassment toward others, with the goal of gaining power over or dominating another individual."

Most bullying is verbal. Mild teasing is standard operating procedure among children. Even good friends "bust" each other. But when the teasing is all one way, relentlessly targeting a vulnerable child, it is not innocent. Sarcastic put-downs and demeaning rumors can be very hurtful. Verbal bullying takes place at all grade levels, but it can be especially intense at middle school.

Bullying can also take more tangible forms, such as “shaking down” children for money, food, or other favors, or threats of violence against a child or the child’s family. Bullies often hint at retribution to discourage victims from reporting them.

Sexual harassment is a type of bullying. It is widespread in schools today, as it is in our society at large. Sexual harassment can take many forms, ranging from gossip, graffiti, and “sexting,” to fondling or grabbing, to forced sexual activity. Even the “milder” forms of sexual harassment can destroy a child’s self-esteem for a long time.

Being a school bus driver means sticking up for vulnerable children.

2.3.2 Take a personal stand against bullying on your bus. Being a school bus driver means sticking up for vulnerable children. All children deserve to be protected from intimidation and fear.

If you see signs of bullying – for instance, an older or stronger child pushing around a vulnerable child, or a group of students repeatedly making fun of one child – intervene immediately and decisively. A stern warning to an aspiring bully might put an end to it.

However, bullies can be clever at hiding what they do. Prevention is more effective than trying to catch bullies in the act. From the first day you take a run, let your students know you simply won’t tolerate name-calling or put-downs. Sticking to this rule every day will create a respectful environment on your bus. It will make for a more pleasant bus ride for your students and for you.

Bullying thrives on intolerance and hate. Children don’t grow up in a vacuum. Many adults in today’s world use hate, scorn, and anger to get their way. Do what you can to make your bus a haven of compassion and tolerance. Whenever the chance presents itself, show children how to accept and respect those who are “different.”

Regularly tell your students to let you know if they ever feel threatened by another student (or adult). Victims of bullying are often embarrassed or afraid to say anything. Reassure them that you will treat any report confidentially so that other students will not know about it. Always let your supervisor or a school administrator know if a child feels threatened in any way.

2.3.3 Threats and violence. School bus drivers must be alert to signs of potential violence. Fortunately, violence on school buses doesn’t happen every day, but it does occur. You need to know what to do if a fight breaks out.

Fights are the most common form of violence on a bus. Fighting ranges from shoving matches between young students to serious fist fights between older students.

Preventing fights is important. ~~Separate~~ students at once if an argument is brewing. If you know your students well, you may be able to detect early warning signs of an escalating dispute. Other children will often try to let you know that something’s about to happen.

Seat children who are arguing as far apart as possible. Each will usually blame the other for provoking the argument. Let them know that they will both be in trouble if a fight breaks out, regardless of who started it. Quick adult intervention can often, but not always, convince arguing students to “cool it.” Even if they stop, report the dispute to your supervisor

after the run – the argument could re-ignite later.

If a fight breaks out, stay calm. Using your strongest, clearest command voice, tell both fighters to “stop right now.”

Do not ignore a fight in the hope it will resolve itself. If the fighting students will not stop, call for assistance by radio. Stop in a safe location and secure your bus. Shut the engine off and take the key with you if you get out of your seat.

**Use your strongest,
clearest command voice to
insist both students “stop
right now.”**

Quickly move other students away from the fight. Do not let anyone cheer on the fighters. You have the legal right to restrain a violent student if it's absolutely necessary to protect other students or yourself, but do so only as a last resort and with extreme caution. You could unintentionally injure a child. (If you do have to restrain a violent child, inform your supervisor as soon as you can.)

Stepping between younger children may keep them apart long enough to cool down, but do not try this with older students taking full swings at each other – you could be seriously hurt. Instead, focus your attention on the student who seems to be getting the worst of it – there's a greater incentive to stop fighting. Use your command voice to direct that student to move away from the other fighter.

While you're waiting for law enforcement, evacuation of the rest of your students may have to be considered in a severe fight. Evacuation is potentially dangerous and

should be a last resort. Children can wander into harm's way once they are off the bus.

The possibility of a weapon must be taken seriously. Weapons are a fact of life in all types and sizes of school districts. Be alert for signs that a student is trying to hide a weapon – bulging pocket or coat, overly protective of a backpack, secretive or suspicious behavior, etc.

If a student tips you off that someone has a weapon, take it seriously. Don't confront the suspected student or try to search the student, or his or her belongings, on your own. Instead, quietly contact base by radio (or cell phone, if you can stop your bus momentarily in a safe location). Let them know what you suspect. Don't wait until the student has gone into school to report your suspicions – it could be too late.

Some school districts use a prearranged code to let a bus driver inform base, without alerting the suspected student, that there could be a weapon on board. Ask your supervisor if your district has a code.

If a weapon is openly displayed, your primary goal is to convince that student to let other children off the bus. Don't attempt to take a knife, gun, or bomb from a student. Trying to be a hero could make the situation worse. Even if you've had weapons or police training in a previous career, your priority as a school bus driver in such a dangerous scenario is to protect the rest of your students. A weapon on a school bus is a matter for law enforcement. Let responding police, who are trained and equipped to do so, handle such a severe situation.

2.4 Relating to Students as a Substitute Driver

2.4.1 Don't be anonymous. In many school districts and bus companies, new drivers start out as substitutes. It's a good way to learn all the routes in your district, and will give you experience for eventually driving a regular run. Some drivers, even veterans, love being a substitute. But being a sub can be challenging.

Being a sub can be challenging. Just as for a substitute teacher, there's an art to managing students as a substitute driver.

Just as for a substitute teacher, there's an art to managing students as a substitute driver. One tip is to make a point of actively engaging children as they board your bus, whether in the morning on the way to school or the afternoon before heading for home. Children are less likely to misbehave when they see you seeing them. Make a concerted effort to connect with every child, even if it's just for a second as they come up the stairs. Don't just sit silently in the bus seat. Smile at them. Let them see you as a real person, not an appendage of the bus.

It's normal to feel nervous about driving a run you've never done before, but try not to show it – you could alarm younger children, and invite mischief from older ones. Making life difficult for subs – substitute teachers or substitute drivers – is a time-honored tradition for older students in some schools. Don't let them sense your anxiety – put on your game face!

On a take-home run, get out of your seat for a moment once all students are on board. Stand up and introduce yourself. Even if you're nervous – facing dozens of students you don't know can be intimidating to anyone – smile. A touch of friendliness and personal interaction before you start out can make a big difference during the run.

2.4.2 Driving an unfamiliar route: Always take at least a few minutes to look over the route sheet before setting out on an unfamiliar run. Never try to read a route sheet while you're driving, or at a bus stop. If you need to look at it again during the route, do it when you're stopped in a safe location.

Before leaving, ask someone in the transportation office, or a driver who knows the run, to go over the route with you. Veteran drivers are an invaluable source of information. Find out which students must cross and any unusual hazards along the route. On a morning run, especially before full light, suggestions for locating the first bus stop will be very useful.

An important responsibility of regularly assigned drivers is to make sure their route sheets are up-to-date. But as a sub, you may still encounter route sheets that are not completely accurate. Address changes, new students, or the exact location of a bus stop may not be reflected on the route sheet. Be prepared for the unexpected at all times. This is one reason substitutes should be the slowest, most cautious drivers in the fleet.

If you can't find a child's stop or get confused while driving an unfamiliar route, stay calm. There's no need to feel embarrassed – it's happened to most substitute drivers at least once in their careers. If you mistakenly drive past a child's stop, never back up! You could back into a vehicle pulled up behind you, or

back over a child. Radio base to ask for guidance.

2.4.3 Finding the right student to help you.

Students can be a big help when driving an unfamiliar run. You need a child who knows the run well, rides most of the way, and speaks clearly. An older child is usually best, but even young children can be good helpers – you just have to find the right one. As a help to subs, some schools identify “student helpers” on their route sheets.

Pick a single child to help you. Having more than one child calling out directions is confusing. Have your helper sit in the front passenger-side seat. Remind the child to let you know well before you reach a stop. Children are children – you may need to remind your helper to stay focused throughout the run.

Remember to thank your student helper at the end of the run!

2.5 Unit 2 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

1. Which of the following statements are true?

- a. Most children don't like an out-of-control bus any more than adults do.
- b. All children deserve a safe and enjoyable bus ride.
- c. Positive relationships with students are the key to safe bus behaviors.
- ☒ d. All of the above.

2. TRUE or FALSE? "Squabbles over where to sit and who to sit with are one of the most common causes of behavior problems on school buses." T

3. TRUE or FALSE? "Unlike adults, children do not need to understand the 'why's' behind rules." F

4. TRUE or FALSE? "Use referrals sparingly, for violations of key safety rules, not to report merely irritating behaviors or minor problems that you could have solved on your own by talking to the child." T

5. TRUE or FALSE? "If a child continues to misbehave, put the child off the bus during the route." F

6. What is referred to as "the most dangerous piece of equipment on your bus?"

- a. Bus tires.
- ☒ b. Internal mirror above the driver.
- c. Exhaust system.
- d. Fuel tank.

7. TRUE or FALSE? "Purposefully embarrassing children - for instance, making fun of a misbehaving child in front of others - usually improves behavior." F

8. Which statement about bullying is true?

- a. Most bullying is verbal.
- b. Bullying is devastating to children - it's not "just kids being kids."
- c. Sexual harassment is a form of bullying.
- ☒ d. All of the above.

9. Which statement about violence on a bus is true?

- ☒ a. Separate students at once if an argument is brewing.
- b. If older students are swinging at each other, step between them.
- c. If you suspect a student has a weapon, search the student's belongings.
- d. All of the above.

10. TRUE or FALSE? "Because they don't have to interact with the students, substitute drivers can usually drive a run more quickly than the regular driver." F

UNIT 2 NOTES & QUESTIONS

CORE UNIT 3: BUS STOP SAFETY

Unit 3 Topics

- 3.1 The Moment of Truth
- 3.2 Bus Stop Safety Procedures
- 3.4 Crossover Mirrors
- 3.4 Route Safety
- 3.5 Unit 3 Review

Introduction

Statistically, children who ride school buses are most at risk when they are getting on or off the bus. This is the single most important fact to keep in mind as you become a school bus driver. For children's and your own sake, you must have a thorough mastery of bus stop safety procedures before transporting students.

Unit 3 of the *Pre-Service Course* will explain how and why children are potentially so vulnerable at bus stops. Most importantly, you will learn exactly what you need to do to make sure children are safe as they get on or off your bus every day.

Unit 3 is a very important part of this course.

3.1 The Moment of Truth

3.1.1 Lessons from tragedy. Thinking about incidents in which children are injured or killed is very sad, but careful accident analysis

may reveal patterns from which lessons can be drawn that help prevent future tragedies.

A review of school bus accident statistics over many decades reveals three important patterns that every school bus driver needs to know.

The first pattern is startling: most children who've been killed in school bus accidents died not in crashes or fires, but while getting on or off of the bus, often directly in front of their homes. Historically, approximately three out of every four school bus fatalities occur at a bus stop, when children are outside the bus. This is why the student loading and unloading process is the "moment of truth" for a school bus driver.

Three out of every four school bus fatalities occur at a bus stop, when children are outside the bus.

Several factors account for the stunning fact that most children are killed outside their bus:

- Most importantly, children are naturally energetic, impulsive, and fearless. Their unpredictability makes it a challenge to control children's behavior when they are outside your bus. In this unit you will learn ways to remind children how to be safe when loading or unloading.
- School buses are large vehicles with many blind spots. There are many different types of school buses. Some offer better visibility than others, but all have blind spots. Children – especially younger, shorter children – can easily be hidden from your direct view when you are in the driver's seat. Unless you are highly alert,

you could run over a child. This nearly unthinkable tragedy is called a "by-own-bus" incident. It is how most student fatalities take place. This unit will explain how to use your bus mirror system and other techniques to check for children in the blind spots.

- Even though it's against the law for motorists to pass a stopped school bus with its red lights flashing, it happens all the time. In fact, State Police estimate 50,000 motorists pass stopped school buses illegally in our state every single day. The modern roadway environment is a dangerous place. It is congested and filled with risk-takers who are late for work and trying to make up time, as well as many other types of equally dangerous motorists: the inexperienced, the elderly, the distracted, and the impaired. Any of them could drive past your bus when a child is in the roadway. This is referred to as a "passing motorist" incident. It is the second most common type of school bus fatality.

Younger children are most at risk when getting on or off your bus.

- Two more important lessons for bus drivers can be drawn from a close study of bus stop tragedies:
- Because of their immaturity and smaller physical stature, younger children are far more at risk than older children when getting on or off your bus. The younger the child, the greater the chance he or she will be hurt or killed at a bus stop.

- Bus stop accidents are twice as likely to occur on the afternoon take-home run than on the morning ride to school. This is largely because children tend to be much more energetic on the way home. They can be pent up from a long day in school. They may also be carrying home school materials and papers that can easily be
- dropped near the bus. Afternoon hours can also be challenging for adults, especially those who have been up since dawn, like most school bus drivers. Mental fatigue is dangerous when dropping off children at a bus stop. Finding ways to stay alert
- through this critical part of the workday cycle is critically important for school bus drivers.

Bus stop accidents are much more likely to occur on the afternoon take-home run.

Throughout your career as a school bus driver, never forget the three critical lessons discussed above:

1. Most student fatalities occur outside the bus.
2. Younger children are most at risk.
3. A take-home run is twice as dangerous as a morning run.

3.1.2 Information saves lives. The importance of the lessons discussed above – most children are killed outside the bus; younger children are most vulnerable; and most fatalities occur on the trip home – cannot be overstated. As a school bus driver, you need to know what situations place children most at risk.

Before New York State's modern training programs were begun in the late 1970's, few school bus drivers had access to critical safety information. You may have senior co-workers in your operation today who started their careers before systematic safety instruction, such as this Pre-Service Course, was provided to bus drivers. A few decades back, new bus drivers were often hired and literally "handed the keys" to begin transporting children that same day.

Through their skills and dedication, even without ready access to critical safety information, many veterans enjoyed long, safe careers as school bus drivers. Our state owes them a debt of gratitude. However, there is a profound difference between the statewide safety record before systematic training was provided to bus drivers and the safety record today.

Our state's 50,000 school bus drivers today have established a safety record almost unimaginable a generation ago.

In the years before our state's training programs were implemented on a widespread basis, many loading and unloading tragedies occurred each year. If children had continued to die in school bus accidents at the rate they did during the mid-1970s, it is reasonable to believe hundreds more children would have perished over the intervening years. Instead, our state's 50,000 school bus drivers today have established a safety record unimaginable a generation ago.

As a new school bus driver, you are joining a select and proud profession. Our state has the

best safety record in the nation and now goes years at a time with no bus stop fatalities whatsoever – an almost unthinkable achievement in the 1970s. While several factors have contributed to this historic safety milestone, the main reason is that school bus drivers are now provided with the critical safety information and training they need to protect children.

3.2 Bus Stop Safety Procedures

3.2.1 Picking up students. When approaching a bus stop to pick up students, follow these safety procedures.

Approaching a stop in the morning:

- Well before you get to the stop, check the status of your master flasher switch. Learn how to do this by feel alone, without taking your eyes off the road. As you approach the stop, double-check the switch to make sure it's "armed," so you can activate the amber pre-warning flashers without any delays.
- Well before you get to the stop, check your driving mirrors for vehicles behind your bus. Be especially alert on high speed roads (more than 35 mph). Assess the following distance and closing speed of vehicles behind your bus to decide how early you should activate your amber pre-warning flashers to alert them of your upcoming stop.
- Activate amber pre-warning flashers early enough that other motorists have enough time to see you, slow down, and stop. A general rule of thumb is about 300' before the stop – the length of a football field – however, there is no "one size fits all" rule about exactly when to turn them on. For

route. In the worst case scenario, you could lose your job, or be charged with negligence.

Bus drivers cannot suspend students on their own. Suspensions, and any other type of student discipline, must be authorized by a school administrator.

Student disciplinary policies vary from school district to school district. A typical policy is a warning from the principal for a first offense, followed by a one day suspension for a second, followed by a three day suspension for a third. Ask your supervisor about your school's policy.

2.2.3 Video. Many school buses are equipped with video systems. Video cameras are very beneficial to student management. Their presence can be a deterrent. If an incident does take place on your bus, a video helps your supervisor or a principal sort out what happened.

There are many types of video systems. Some consist of a single camera mounted on the bulkhead above the driver. Other systems employ several camera heads throughout the bus to provide a better view of students. "Clever" students may try to hide from view behind seat backs. Some systems let you mark or "red flag" the video while driving (usually with a small button on your control panel) so it's easier to find an incident later.

Many video systems document the bus driver's actions as well as the students'. What you say to your students, or to a parent at a bus

stop, may be captured on video. Although being "on camera" at all times can be unsettling at first, video documentation protects bus drivers from allegations of improper conduct.

Many video systems also log bus speed, braking, warning light use, location, and other vehicle actions. Drivers who take safety seriously have nothing to fear from such documentation.

2.2.4 Five behavior management mistakes to avoid. Student management can be challenging – even for experienced school bus drivers. Out of frustration, bus drivers sometimes make the wrong decision about how to handle behavior problems. Learning from other drivers can help you avoid making the same mistakes. Behavior management mistakes to avoid include:

1. *Inconsistency.* The best way to win the cooperation of children on your bus is by setting clear, realistic behavior expectations and consistently following through on them. Fairness is very important to children. If you apply the rules differently depending on how much you like a particular child, or on your mood that day, children will notice.
2. *Too timid.* Until you really get to know them, interacting with dozens of children at once can be intimidating. The collective energy level of younger children on a bus can be overwhelming at first, and many teenagers have mastered the art of appearing sullen to any adult with authority. However, you are legally responsible for maintaining reasonable order on your bus. Don't let students run the show. Don't be anonymous – get to know your students as quickly as possible, and let them get to know you. Even if you're "the quiet type," find a way to let students know you are in charge. Win their trust by showing